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Viewing cable 06MANAGUA127, ELECTION 2006: POSSIBLE SCENARIOS, RISKS, AND

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Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06MANAGUA127**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06MANAGUA127	2006-01-23 21:32	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MANAGUA 000127

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/OAS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2016

TAGS: [KDEM](#) [NU](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTION 2006: POSSIBLE SCENARIOS, RISKS, AND
POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

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Summary/Introduction

1. (C) Our election priorities in Nicaragua are twofold: ensure Nicaragua holds clean, fair, credible, and inclusive national elections and encourage Nicaraguans to vote for presidential and legislative candidates who uphold democratic principles. We will encourage an electoral process that will help Nicaragua strengthen its democracy and democratic institutions, create a truly representative balance among Nicaragua's political powers, and reinforce a bilateral productive working relationship to further economic and security cooperation. Currently, a four-way presidential race is the most likely scenario. However, there still is a possibility this could be reduced to a three-way race by summer and possibly even a two-way race thereafter. End Summary/Introduction.

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Basic Premises

2. (C) The following are some basic premises concerning Nicaragua's current political landscape:

--Most Nicaraguans seek a change in their political leadership and reject the current leadership of Nicaragua's two dominant political parties, the Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) and the Sandinista Party (FSLN). Early polls peg dissident PLC candidate Eduardo Montealegre (ALN-PC) and dissident FSLN member Herty Lewites as the clear front-runners.

--Anti-Sandinista does not necessarily mean democratic; Aleman's caudillismo is not democratic. Further, a dissident Sandinista, such as Lewites, could conceptually support democratic governance.

--The PLC is unlikely to reform and move squarely into the democratic, anti-caudillista column in large part because Aleman will not loosen his hold on the party apparatus and the PLC leaders are too compromised to break away from him.

--To encourage Lewites to maintain his independence from Ortega, Lewites needs to believe we will work with him/his government if he wins in November.

--An Ortega victory in a clean election is possible, but not

probable. His negatives are very high and he has lost three presidential bids in the past 15 years.

--Montealegre cannot affiliate with the PLC as long as the PLC remains under Aleman's control. He would lose all of his credibility and much of his support if he were to do so.

--A four-way presidential race offers Nicaraguans real choices and the opportunity to strengthen their democracy - but such a race is unpredictable as four roughly equal political forces would vie for the prize.

-- Voter turnout and the votes of independents and the undecided are pivotal. Low voter turnout is likely to favor Ortega; high turnout is more likely to favor the anti-Sandinista vote, and the anti-caudillo vote more generally.

--Vigorous international monitoring starting NOW, combined with robust Nicaraguan observation can minimize pact-driven fraud. Without it, fraud at levels that will affect the electoral outcome is likely.

--Voter education is key. Many Nicaraguans are illiterate and recognize only party symbols; voters must be informed of which candidates and parties correspond to the different symbols and "casillas" (party registry numbers) on the ballot.

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Four-Way Race
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13. (C) As it stands, a four-way presidential race is the most likely scenario. If this holds, it would represent a

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new political phenomenon for Nicaragua, one that could offer Nicaraguans a broader choice of candidates and platforms and an opportunity to choose a leader who will focus on strengthening Nicaragua's fragile democracy rather than consolidating personal power or the party's control over Nicaragua and its resources. Likely candidates in a four-way race are the following:

-Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) candidate (TBD - probably not until May). The party has two basic options: an Alvarado/Rizo combination in a quest for a "respectable" ticket, or the election of a more malleable Alemanista candidate.

-Sandinista (FSLN) candidate Daniel Ortega

-FSLN dissident Herty Lewites

-PLC dissident Eduardo Montealegre (now ALN-PC)

14. (SBU) To win on the first round, a candidate must have at least 35 percent of the votes and lead the closest competitor by at least five points. Thus, in a four-way race, a run-off may well be required. Lewites and Montealegre lead the polls. If the elections are clean and inclusive, and if Lewites and Montealegre are able to develop strong enough organizations to transform their popular support into votes, the duo could face each other in a runoff.

15. (C) A four-way race presents risks and it could suffer setbacks, among them:

-Voter fraud could be easier to commit and more prevalent due to non-traditional circumstances (the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) remains in the hands of the "pacted" FSLN and PLC, while other parties currently have no representation).

-Either or both of the dissident candidates are

disqualified on trumped-up legal charges;

-Lewites rejoins the Ortega FSLN fold and drops out of the election;

-One or both of the dissident candidates fail to develop an organization capable of transforming popular support into sufficient votes and defending the vote against fraud perpetrated by the majority parties; or,

-Lewites takes more votes from Montealegre than from Ortega, and Lewites and Ortega end up being the top two vote-getters in the first round. (Note: this scenario is highly unlikely because of the sizeable anti-Sandinista bloc (over 50 %) and Herty Lewite's weakness in the countryside.)

¶6. (C) If PLC Liberals, including rural voters who tend to vote Liberal, rally around Montealegre in a second round, he would be the favorite.

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Three-Way Races
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¶7. (C) The three-way race scenario presents two possibilities:

-Ortega, Lewites, and a Liberal Alliance candidate (likely Montealegre), or

-Ortega, a PLC candidate (likely selected by Arnolando Aleman), and Montealegre.

Although these scenarios appear unlikely at this time, they could arise later in the year (as the election date nears and campaign time diminishes). Lewites could eventually decide to run as Ortega's VP, or be "disqualified," or a PLC-Montealegre alliance could conceivably materialize.

¶8. (C) Risks of a three-way scenario:

-If Montealegre were to form an alliance with a PLC still under Aleman's control, this could subtract, not add, votes for Montealegre and the Liberal, anti-FSLN cause. Montealegre could be perceived to have sacrificed his democratic principles to win Aleman's benediction, and more of the undecided and independent voters could gravitate to

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Lewites rather than Montealegre.

-An Ortega-Lewites alliance would increase the likelihood of a Sandinista win, especially if the Liberals remain divided. However, Lewites would also lose a large number of interdependent voters if he associated with Ortega.

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Two-Way Race
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¶9. (C) A two-way race, pitting an Ortega-Lewites Sandinista alliance against a PLC-Montealegre Liberal alliance, is unlikely but could emerge in reaction to an Ortega-Lewites or a PLC-Montealegre alliance.

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Polls - What We Need to Know
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¶10. (SBU) Although the polls tell us much, gaps remain in the information available, specifically in the following areas:

-More details on the breakdown of Nicaraguans according to party affiliation and strength/depth of that party affiliation (PLC, FLSN, Conservatives, minor parties, none, independent, undecided, refuse to reveal).

-Breakdown of Nicaraguan voters according to ideological rather than political affiliations (Liberal, Sandinista, Conservative, independent, none, other, refuse to reveal) --and what these ideological/philosophical difference represent and/or are perceived to be.

-Intention to vote (yes/no, candidate preference VS party VS ideological preference VS platform/program offerings (which preference will carry more weight on Election Day); preference or not for political change.

-Information on regional preferences to improve message targeting.

¶11. (SBU) In addition to traditional polling, focus groups would provide a more complete picture of voter interests (e.g., top three concerns), and preferences. We will draw on this information to hone and better target our messages to different audiences.

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Our Message
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¶12. (U) Clear, concise, and consistent messages conveying our policy will minimize distortion:

-The Nicaraguan people have shown they want fresh, truly representative leadership that cares about their needs, not personal or partisan interests. We too care about these needs - this is what true democracy is about.

-We and other donors hold a stake in seeing that the democratic wishes of the Nicaraguan people are fulfilled.

-We have contributed hundreds of millions of dollars over the past decade to help give Nicaraguans a fair shake - to hold well paying jobs, put food on the table, and educate their children. We cannot allow these efforts to go to waste or to permit Aleman or Ortega to steal the hopes of the Nicaraguan people to better their lives.

-We make no apologies for defending the rights of the Nicaraguan people to live in dignity and prosperity.

-It is up to the Nicaraguan people to determine the direction their country will take and to choose their new leaders.

-Every vote counts and every voter should have a chance to vote.

-We encourage Nicaraguans to select leadership that best represents their aspirations.

-Our interest is helping to ensure the elections are free fair, credible, and inclusive.

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-We endorse principles and ideas, not candidates, and representative leadership, separation of powers, honest, public service, and selection by merit.

-We can work with a candidate who is elected in a fair and transparent process and who will strengthen Nicaragua's democracy, govern under the rule of law, and partner with us on economic and security matters.

-The CSE is responsible for ensuring that all eligible Nicaraguan voters obtain their cedula, cast their ballots unencumbered, and have their votes counted.

-We will work with the CSE, domestic observers and Nicaragua's donor partners to make that possible.

